

(65)
The Nature and proper Evidence
of REGENERATION;

O R,

The NEW and SECOND BIRTH:

Considered in a

SERMON

Preach'd in the Parish-Churches of

EAST-GREENWICH,

IN THE

COUNTY of *KENT,*

Upon WHIT-SUNDAY;

A N D

St. Peter the Poor, LONDON,

On TRINITY-SUNDAY, 1739.

By RALPH SKERRET, D. D.

Chaplain to the R^t Hon. Henry Earl of Grantham.

I COR. xiv. 40.

Let all Things be done Decently, and in Order.

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PREFACE.

THE following Sermon was preached with a sincere Design of fixing in the Minds of its Hearers, such a rational Account of Regeneration, or the New Birth, according to the Scriptures, as might engage them in an uniform Course of Piety in this, and entitle them, through the Merits of Christ, to the Enjoyment of eternal Happiness in a future State: And it is now published for the more successful Furtherance of the same beneficial Ends. It hath been always, and very justly, observed, that the irregular Lives of Christians are not owing so much to their Ignorance of what is morally Good or Evil, as to a secret vain Persuasion of obtaining the divine Favour, and, in Consequence of That, future Happiness,

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built upon something exclusive of, and separated from, a conscientious Practice of Virtue and Religion. And indeed as Novelty and Assurance, in these licentious Days, attract the unstable Minds and Affections of the Populace; so a sensible Feeling, within themselves, those rapturous Illuminations which few or none can properly describe, and, pretending to enjoy what neither Reason or the Nature of Things require, is confidently affirmed to be sufficient to put Men of all Conditions into a State of Salvation: And consequently, substituted in the Place of a regular Obedience to God's Commandments. In Support of which Affirmation, the admired Teachers of such Doctrines assert, That Men, in all Stations, at least Their Followers, are justify'd before God merely by an Act of Faith in Christ, without any Regard to good Works,

P R E F A C E. ♣

Works, either past, present, or to come *.

*The Absurdity and ill Effects of these new and unscriptural Doctrines, together with the Folly of an inconsistent and partial Obedience to the express Rules and Precepts of the Gospel, I have endeavoured to set forth in the following Discourse; which is made publick, not out of any fond Persuasion of its own Importance or Value, but rather that, as a faithful Steward of the Myste-
ries*

* Mr. Whitefield's Journal at London, p. 2. And likewise his Journal at Evesham in Worcestershire; in which he thus speaks, concerning a Gentleman of that Town, *Whom God, to use his Own Words, hath very lately been pleased to call by his free Grace. Behold, says he, here was One who constantly attended on the Means of Grace (by which I presume Mr. W. means publick Worship, hearing the Word preached, and receiving the Holy Sacrament) exact in his Morals, humane and courteous in his Conversation, who gave Much in Alms, was frequent in private Duties; and yet, as Mr. W. proceeds to acquaint us, till about six Weeks ago, when God sent a poor travelling Woman (that came thither to sell Straw Toys) to instruct this Gentleman in the Nature of our Second Birth, he was as destitute of any saving, experimental Knowledge in Jesus Christ, as Those on whom His Name was never called.* Page 81.

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ries of Christ Jesus, I might not appear to stand by unconcerned, or look on in Silence, when the restless Deceivers of the People make it their daily Business to fill the Heads of the Ignorant and Unwary with wild perplexive Notions, the better to form their Behaviour and Manners according to their own pernicious, but gainful Model.

With this honest Intention I have published what occurred to my Thoughts upon the Subject of Regeneration, or the New Birth, highly necessary to be set in a proper Light, when so palpably misrepresented by subtle and designing Men. What Reception a Discourse of this Nature may meet with, in an Age so fond of Novelty, and so much influenced by Outward Shew and Artful Representations, I am entirely unconcerned. I have sincerely done my Duty without any sinister or reproach-

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reproachful Views: And, from all strict Adherers to Peace and Order, as well as from all true Lovers of divine Worship in the Beauty of Holiness, I promise myself Candour and Indulgence, what Imperfections soever may attend this Performance, which appears abroad for the common Benefit: By endeavouring to render Mankind, the laborious and mechanick Part thereof more especially, better Husbands, and more useful to Society, by giving them an Opportunity of considering how greatly they break in upon all relative Duties, and the Benefits of Social Life, by daily assembling themselves in Troops upon Hills, and the Neighbouring Commons, under a vain Pretence of serving God more acceptably; who requires no such extraordinary Service at their Hands: Because all such Service is contrary to common Decency, Unanimity, and

and good Order, a Contempt of the established Places of Worship in their own Parishes, and manifestly tends to the certain Prejudice of Themselves and their Families: Upon whom, if they continue to pursue such Unwarrantable Measures, Poverty, to use the Words of Solomon, will come as one that travelleth, and Want as an armed Man; and, under such Circumstances, where, alas! must they seek Relief but from the common Charge of the respective Parishes to which they belong? Ob therefore, that such Over-righteous Persons were so truly wise, as to understand these Things; that they would seriously consider the fatal Consequences of the Measures they pursue; and that they would, in Justice to themselves, and Pity to their Dependants, act no more so contrary to sound Reason, and the Honour of the established Religion.

St.

St. JOHN iii. 5.

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a Man be born of Water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.

MY Text contains a Part of that Conference between our Blessed Lord and *Nicodemus*, an eminent *Pharisee*, and a Chief Ruler amongst the *Jews*; who, 'tis reasonable to suppose, was led to visit this Divine Teacher, not merely out of Curiosity, but with an honest Intent, to be more fully satisfied concerning the Truth and Importance of his Doctrines; which he himself saw confirmed by *Signs, and Wonders, and divers Miracles*: From the Consideration whereof he became inwardly persuaded, that the Teacher of such important Doctrines, thus established, was an extraordinary Person *sent from Heaven*, for

the Instruction and Benefit of Mankind. Rabbi, says he, *We know that thou art a Teacher come from God; because no Man can do the Miracles which thou dost, except God be with him.*

This Acknowledgment led the Holy Jesus into a Discourse, not only concerning the Truth of his Doctrines, but likewise what Qualifications were necessary for obtaining that future and endless Happiness, which he was manifested in our Nature to procure for all such Persons, as should be admitted into the Fellowship of his Holy Religion; and, amongst others, concerning the Nature of Regeneration, or that New and Second Birth, without which no Person whatsoever must pretend to become his Disciple here, or enjoy the Benefit and Happiness, consequent thereupon, in a future State.

A Point of Doctrine which deserves our greater Attention and Regard; because *Nicodemus*, a Master of *Israel*, had conceived this Spiritual Birth to be an Event as unlikely to be brought about, as that of going a second Time through the Course of a Natural One. Which extravagant Way
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of judging, concerning this important Affair, our Blessed Lord condescended to rectify, by making him sensible, that a Man's being born a second Time after a natural Manner, will be of no Significancy or Advantage to his spiritual Condition ; because, as he argues, Verse the sixth of this Chapter, *That which is born of the Flesh, is Flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit, is Spirit :* Or, in other Words, *Flesh can only produce Flesh ;* but to bring forth a new Spirit, 'tis necessary that the vital Principle likewise be spiritual.

And what Difficulty soever this Ruler in *Israel* might conceive, in assenting to the Reality of this wondrous Event ; forasmuch as neither the Cause, or Manner of its Operation, fell under the Notice of his bodily Senses ; yet the Holy Jesus expressly assures him, in the Words before us, that Regeneration, or the New Birth, is the only sure Condition of Mens Acceptance with the Almighty ; and a Qualification indispensably necessary for procuring an Entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. *Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a Man be born of Water and the Spirit,*

rit, he can't enter into the Kingdom of God.
The better to explain and improve this Portion of Scripture to our common Benefit, it will be expedient for me to inlarge upon it in the following Method:

- I. By enquiring into the Nature of *Regeneration*, or that *New Birth*, effected by *Water and the Spirit*; here mentioned as a proper Qualification for gaining Admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven.
- II. By endeavouring to make you sensible, that unless we are thus *born of Water and the Spirit*, we cannot gain Admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven.
- III. By laying before you some proper Marks or Evidence, whereby we may all, upon examining into our *spiritual Condition*, know whether we are of that happy Number which are thus *regenerated*; and consequently entitled, through the Merits of Christ, to Admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

First

First then, Regeneration, or that New Birth, necessary to qualify Men for entering into the *Kingdom of Heaven*, is, according to the Account given of it in our Liturgy, a *Death unto Sin, and a Life unto Righteousness* : For being by Nature born in Sin, and the Children of Wrath; we are by Baptism made the Children of Grace. From this spiritual Relation, we derive a sure Title to all the Privileges and Blessings of the Covenant, into which, by our Sureties, we enter with Almighty God in that sacred Ordinance; which is called by our Saviour the being *born of Water*, and was intended for a Sign or Means of our being afterwards born *of the Spirit*, by duly improving, when we come to Years of Maturity and Discretion, that Measure of *divine Grace*, ready to be imparted to us, as Occasions require, to all the Purposes of holy Living. Upon which Account our holy Church, immediately after any Person is baptized, gives Thanks to Almighty God, and acknowledges him a merciful Father, for having been pleased to regenerate the Person, then newly baptized,

with his Holy Spirit, to receive him for his own Child by Adoption, and to incorporate him into his holy Church.

For our better understanding the Nature of this Doctrine, so necessary to be practised in order to Salvation, it will be proper to consider the several Rites and constant Usages of the *Jews*: Among whom it was a Practice, we read *, whenever they profelyted a Heathen to their Religion, to give him Admission into the Church, and a Claim to the Privileges of *Judaism*, by *Circumcision, Baptism, and a Peace-Offering*. And, in Consequence of his being admitted to such Privileges, and a Place given him amongst the true *Israelites*, *New-born* was

* The *Israelites*, as the learned Dr. *Hammond* observes from the *Jewish Talmud*, do not enter into Covenant with God, but by these three Things, *Circumcision, Baptism, and a Peace-Offering*; and their *Profelytes* likewise. Now, such Persons, as were thus initiated into *Judaism*, discarded all their former Relations; not only their former Behaviour and Manner of Worship, as the same *Talmud* expresses it, but likewise their Relations of Kindred and Consanguinity; and came forth as if they were born of a new Mother. So that he, who was related to the profelyted Person before, ceased to be so accounted by him afterwards.

was the usual Title and Character by which they distinguished him. In Conformity to this Manner of *making Profelytes*, we may reasonably believe, our Saviour instituted the Sacrament of *Baptism*, as a certain customary Rite or Ceremony, which should constantly attend the Admission of Children and Profelytes into the *Christian Church*; as the *Jews* admitted theirs by *Baptism, Circumcision, and a Peace-Offering*. And whereas the being admitted into the Fellowship of this holy Church by Baptism gives every Christian a proper Claim to all the several Rights and Privileges thereunto belonging, whereof the Assistance of the *Holy Spirit* is a peculiar one, and the greatest and most valuable of any: If therefore every *baptized Person* rightly and duly improves the kind Offers of Assistance given him by the *Holy Spirit*, and industriously blows up the first Sparks of divine Grace into a holy and persevering Flame, the better to be enabled to perform his baptismal Vow and Covenant: He certainly may, upon these Accounts, be properly said *to be born, not only of Water, but of the Spirit*.

Why

Why our rightly improving the Assistance of the *Holy Spirit* should be expressed by being *born of the Spirit*; no Person can be at a Loss for a substantial Reason, who seriously considers, that, as in all *Ordinary Productions*, the Thing born receives the Nature and Resemblance of That, from whence its Being was derived: So the Holy Scripture, in Allusion thereto, represents Mankind as *born either of God or Satan*, according as they are either acted by the Principles of *divine Grace*, or governed by the sinful Lusts of the Flesh, and the Wiles of Satan. *In this*, says St. *John**, *the Children of God are manifest, and the Children of the Devil: Whosoever doth not Righteousness*, though he hath been *baptized*, yet cannot properly be said to be *born of the Spirit*.

That this Account of *Regeneration*, or the *New Birth*, agrees exactly with our Saviour's Meaning by *being born again* seems evident, from that other Part of his Discourse with *Nicodemus*, upon this Subject: Who, having formed a wrong Notion of this Doctrine, with some
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* 1 *John* iii. 10.

Emotion and Surprize enquired, *How can these Things be?* To whom our Saviour replies, *Are you a Master of Israel, and know not these Things?* Or, in other Words, *Are you a Doctor of the Jewish Sanhedrim, and ignorant of the Customs and Practices of your own Nation?* Can a Person of your distinguished Sense and Judgment be unacquainted with that Expression, *New-born?* A Character under which every Heathen, profelyted to the Jewish Religion, was always represented. *Marvel not therefore, that I say unto you, ye must be born again.* Especially when you consider, that This is only taking upon yourself the Name and Character of your Own Profelytes: Which you must solemnly do first *by Water*, in that Sacrament of Baptism which I intend shortly to institute; and afterwards, the better to inforce that introductory Part of the *New Birth*, by the *Holy Spirit* likewise: A competent Measure of whose divine Gifts will be imparted to every good Christian, in order to assist him in the due Discharge of those several important Duties, to which his Baptismal

tifmal Vow and Covenant strictly oblige him.

As therefore a Man's being *born of Water and the Spirit* is declared by our Saviour to be a proper Qualification for gaining Admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven; so may we reasonably conclude, from what hath been urg'd in this Particular, that, *the Washing of Baptism outwardly, and the inward Sanctification of the Holy Ghost*, are the chief and only Principles upon which this necessary Qualification can properly be raised. Which naturally leads me to the Consideration of my

Second Head, under which I shall endeavour to make you sensible, that, *unless we are thus born of Water and the Spirit, we cannot possibly gain Admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven*. The Kingdom of Heaven, in *Scripture-phrase*, signifies sometimes the Perfection of Happiness in a future State, and sometimes the Practice of Virtue in the Fellowship of the Christian Church, and sometimes both of them together: These being One, and the Same
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Thing in Reality, and differing only in Time and Degree. For Almighty God pursues one uniform and regular Design of bringing all Mankind to Virtue and Happiness, which must always be considered as inseparable from each other ; since the Good begin their Heaven upon Earth, and finish hereafter what was imperfect here, For Virtue is the only sure Foundation of true Happiness, and Happiness is, both in the Nature of Things, and by divine Appointment, the genuine Fruit and Effect of Virtue ; differing from each other but as Seed-Time from Harvest, or as Childhood from Man's Estate : Virtue being the Ground and Principle of Happiness, growing up and improving gradually towards the Perfection of Glory, *when this Mortal shall have put on Immortality.*

The *Kingdom of Heaven*, therefore, when it signifies both the State of Virtue, and the Perfection of Glory, cannot be said to be used in *different Senses*, but in its most proper and *natural Signification* : And it is of little Importance in which of the two Senses we occasionally understand it. For if by the *Kingdom*

of *Heaven* be meant the present State of the Gospel, doubtless it is principally with Regard to its Improvement, and final Issue in a future State; and if thereby be understood the consummate Glory and Happiness of that State; this always presupposes the Establishment and Practice of true Holiness here upon Earth: Consequently, we may reasonably conclude, that both are included in those Words of our Saviour to *Nicodemus*. Especially if we consider, that what the Holy Jesus calls being baptized with *Water and the Spirit*, *St. Paul* styles a Belief of the Truth, and the Sanctification of the Spirit: And what that Sanctification is, the same Apostle more distinctly explains in his Epistle to the Christians at *Corinth*. * *Know ye not, says he, that the Unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven: And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, in the Name of Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. Whereby Men of all Conditions, as he further observes, become qualified for the Remission of Sins, and gain a Title to that heavenly Kingdom, into which nothing that is unclean*

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* 1 Cor. v. 9, &c.

can procure an Entrance; nothing that is not purified by the Washing of Regeneration, and the Renewal of the Holy Spirit: Expressions the very same in Signification with those used here by our Saviour: Which suppose a Death unto Sin, and a New Birth unto Righteousness, as the proper Requisites for becoming Members of the Christian Church, and Inheritors of that Happiness prepared in Heaven for all true Believers. For being conceived in Sin, as the Psalmist speaks, and brought forth in Iniquity; we are therefore by Nature the Children of Wrath; and consequently can have no Claim to that Fulness of Joy, and those Rivers of Pleasure in God's Presence, except we become regenerate in Baptism, are actuated by the Influence of the Spirit, and prove the Truth of these Qualifications by a Life of perfect Sincerity and undisssembled Holiness; according to that of our Saviour, Blessed are the Pure in Heart, for they, and they only shall, because they alone are qualify'd to, see and enjoy their Creator to endless Ages.

So that was a wicked unregenerate Person admitted to the beatifick Vision of
God

God in Heaven, he could not think himself happy, where every Thing would appear so very opposite to his Temper and Sense of Happiness. An Assertion founded on that general, known Maxim, *That all Pleasure results from the Agreeableness of the Object ; and its being suited to the Faculty and Taste of the Party enjoying it.* From whence 'tis evident, that They understand not the Nature of true Happiness, who expect or imagine they can attain it in any other Way. For, if Almighty God be the only valuable Object of our Happiness, and the surest Foundation of Delight and Friendship laid in a Similitude of Temper and Behaviour ; so long therefore as we continue in an *unregenerate State*, and consequently in a Temper and Behaviour removed from, and inconsistent with, true *Holiness and Virtue* : Though we were actually seated in Heaven amidst Angels and Saints departed ; yet should we, notwithstanding, be incapable of enjoying any true or lasting Happiness ; for Want of being transformed into the divine Nature and Image, by the *Renewal of our Minds* ; That necessary and essential Qualification for every
such

such valuable Enjoyment. A Consideration which ought to influence our Endeavours to resemble God in all his *imitable Perfections*; since this is the only sure Method we can take, to secure his divine Favour at present, and become the joyful Partakers of his transcendent Glory and Happiness in a future State. Which brings me to lay before you, under my

Third Head, some proper *Marks or Evidence*, whereby we may all, upon examining into our spiritual Condition, know, whether we are of that happy Number which are thus *regenerated*; and consequently entitled, through the Merits of Christ, to an Admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven. For the Knowledge which Christians have of their being in a *State of Regeneration*, and thereby entitled to an Admittance into the Kingdom of Heaven, will Never be so plainly convey'd to them by the Testimony of the *Holy Spirit*, as to exclude, or render useless, those *Outward Marks* proper to satisfy them concerning the *Reality* of all such necessary, and desirable Knowledge. 'Tis true, indeed,

deed, says an Author of great Learning, the Holy Spirit convinces our Judgment, raises in us good Inclinations, and graciously performs all other Offices necessary to Piety and Virtue. But these religious Offices he performs in us, and with us, and by us; and if the Scripture had not expressly declared, that all the Good we do, in a religious Way, proceeds from Almighty God, we could not, as the same Author goes on to argue, many Times distinguish between the Motions of His Spirit, and those of our Own. Accordingly St. John, we find, makes it his Business, throughout his first Epistle, to lay down such proper Marks and Characters, as might abundantly instruct the Christians of that Time, concerning the true Nature of their Spiritual Condition. And accordingly we may assuredly know our own respective Circumstances, and whether we stand in the Number of wicked or regenerate Persons, by seriously attending to the Evidence, which the following Particulars give to this Purpose. Which Evidence properly consists,

First,

First, In maintaining a constant and uniform Obedience to *All God's Commandments*.

Secondly, In doing This upon true *Christian Principles*, and with the entire Concurrence of our Wills and Affections.

Thirdly, In persevering, through the whole Course of our Lives, in such an uniform and regular *Obedience*: Or, if we happen to fall from our *Stedfastness* in the Paths of Virtue, recovering ourselves, by a timely and sincere *Repentance*.

First, 'Tis a proper Evidence of our being in a State of *Regeneration*, when we maintain a constant and uniform Regard to *All God's Commandments*. There is no Person whatsoever, so entirely lost to Reason and Virtue, but what finds it for his *Interest*, and consequently agreeable to his *Inclinations*, to observe Some of the divine Laws and Statutes; even whilst he allows himself in the Practice of this or the other *Favourite Vice*, upon which Religion exer-

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cises its Powers but feebly. But the truly *regenerate Person* takes the divine Commandments as he finds them laid before him ; and never presumes to dispense with any one Precept or Injunction therein contained.

From hence holy *David* pleads his own Sincerity, and grounds his Hope of Acceptance with the Almighty : *Then shall I not be ashamed*, says he, *when I have Respect unto All the divine Commandments.* 'Tis This Evidence of our being *regenerate*, and this Claim to future Happiness in Consequence thereof, that our Saviour means, when telling his Disciples, and in them all Christians : *You are my Friends, if you do Whatsoever I command you.* And upon this Account St. *James* declares, those Men deceive themselves with groundless Pretences to Religion, who *bridle not their Tongues* ; what Conscience or extraordinary Zeal soever they Occasionally shew for other Duties.

But although the Deceit here mentioned by the Apostle be peculiar to the *Vices of the Tongue*, beyond all other Irregularities ; yet Christians, of what Denomination soever,

soever, Miserably deceive themselves, who regard not the Nature and Conditions of the *New Birth*, in their proper Extent and Latitude. Many, I am sensible, flatter themselves with imaginary Notions of mortal and venial Sins: Others depend upon being saved from an *Inward Feeling* of the extraordinary Motions and Impulses of the *Spirit*; without any Regard to *good Works*, the sure and proper Fruits of the Spirit: And a third Sort vainly hope, that a few Spots will easily be overlook'd in a Crowd of good Actions: Not considering that, by such an inconsistent and partial Regard to the *divine Commandments*, they do not so properly submit to God's as choose their Own Conditions; both of becoming Disciples of Christ, and enjoying endless Happiness, the Reward of that Discipleship. Quite contrary to that true *Christian Obedience*, proper to recommend them to the divine Love and Friendship, which allows of no particular *Favourite Iniquity*, no single Exception to the *whole Law*. Which, to every dispassionate and unprejudiced Person, furnishes Proof sufficient, that no Man whatsoever can be satisfied he is *born*

of Water and the Spirit, except his Heart sincerely gives him that Testimony of the *Psalmist*, *I hold strait all God's Commandments, and all false Ways I utterly abhor* *.

Secondly, Another Mark or Character of our being *regenerate*, and consequently *born again of Water and the Spirit*, is, the shewing an universal Regard to our Duty upon true *Christian Principles*, and with the entire Concurrence of our Wills and Affections.

The Principles, upon which Mankind act, in all Religious Cases, are of such very great Importance, that, without a due Regard to these certain Springs of Action, no Distinction can be properly made between Vice and Virtue. 'Tis not sufficient therefore to perform the *Duties of Christianity*, as the *Pharisees* did those of the *Jewish Law*, to be seen of Men, to establish a Reputation amongst our Neighbours, or to serve some other such Worldly View or Interest: Nor will any bare External Devotion or Worship denominate us Persons *born of Water and the Spirit*. The truly

* *Psalm* cxix. 128.

truly *regenerate Person* constantly acts upon higher Principles, and much nobler Views: His inward Man always goes along with his external Conduct; he worships God in Spirit and in Truth, with Zeal and Fervency, no less than with bodily Gestures; and he is careful to become pure in Heart, as well as in outward Appearance.

However wise therefore, or praise-worthy we may fancy ourselves, from observing any Degree of Temperance or Justice, Charity or Devotion whatsoever, exclusive of an unfeigned Love for God and our Fellow-Christians: Such a designing formal Behaviour will amount to little true Religion. Because Views, so indirect and selfish, are, in Reality, no better than counterfeit Shew and Pretence; not so properly serving God, as gratifying Ourselves. And therefore highly inconsistent with that regular and uniform State of *Regeneration*; which constantly exalts Nature into Grace, and sensual Wisdom into pure and undefiled Religion: Under an awful Sense and Reverence for the Authority of that Divine Lawgiver, who hath strictly commanded us to perform, Whatever we

undertake in a Religious Way, *heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto Men*, knowing that of the Lord we shall surely receive the due Reward of our Labours, *if We faint not*. Upon which Account it will become us to examine our Spiritual Condition,

Thirdly, By that Other Part of the Evidence proper to satisfy us, Whether we stand in the Number of *regenerate* Persons, arising from keeping the divine Commandments, not only out of a religious *Principle*, but likewise *persevering* in such an uniform and regular Obedience; or, if at any Time we happen to fall from our *Stedfastness* in the Paths of Virtue, recovering ourselves to our former Condition by a sincere and timely Repentance.

This Particular is the natural and easy Consequence of what went before. Because there can be no Security in judging of our Own, or determining upon any Other Man's *Regeneration* and *New Birth* otherwise, than from the general Design, and settled Course and Tenour of our Actions: Consequently, the truly *regenerate* Person
never

never serves God by violent Heats and impetuous Sallies, frequently interrupted, and often changed into Measures of a quite contrary Nature: But in All Cases makes the inviolable Constancy of his Love for God and his *Neighbour* give Testimony to the Zeal and Sincerity of what he professes. And, when the sincere Christian is directed to walk, like *Zachary* and *Elizabeth*, in all the Commandments of God blameless, this plainly intimates, that either to lose Ground, or stand still Occasionally, is a manifest Neglect of Duty. And the Comparisons of a *Race*, a *Fight*, and the like, make it evident, that the *Prize* is reserved only for such Persons as run with *Patience*; and that they must continue *faithful unto Death*, who expect to receive a *Crown of Life and Righteousness*.

But forasmuch as the wisest and best of God's Children are liable to offend, and consequently want Power sufficient always to stand upright; this indulgent Father hath therefore graciously provided for them the sovereign *Remedy of Repentance*, as a proper and effectual Means of recovering themselves, when, through Weakness or

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Inadvertency they fail of *continued Righteousness*. A Method of Indulgence not only exceeding kind and gracious in itself, but likewise most happy for Mankind in every State and Circumstance of Life whatsoever. For what, alas! would become of the most circumspect and watchful *Christians*, if there was no Place for *Repentance* and second Thoughts: No Veil to be thrown over the *Follies of Youth*; nor any Change and Amendment to be accepted, for the deliberate Offences of our *riper Years*? Whereas now the Promise of Pardon and Acceptance, through the Merits of Christ, belongs to a sincere *Reformation*: And every surprized and unwary, every thoughtless and inconsiderate Sinner may always find *Shelter*, from the divine Wrath and Vengeance, in this *City of Refuge*; provided he considers, and forsakes the Evil of his Doings in *due Season*. All which Abundantly proves, that Constancy, out of a *religious Principle*, in performing the *Whole* of our Duty, gives Certain Evidence of our Actually being in a State of *Regeneration*; and that a speedy and dutiful *Return to God*, after we have
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at any Time unhappily gone astray, is the surest and most effectual Method of avoiding all *Vicious Habits* : The Only Things, according to the *Tenour of the Gospel*, inconsistent with such a desirable and happy Condition.

To sum up the Whole. No Person, of what *Degree* or *Condition* soever, can be incorporated into Christ's *holy Church*, and admitted into the *Kingdom of Heaven*, the happy Privilege of such an Incorporation, except he be *regenerate* and *born anew of Water, and the Spirit*. Of *Water* in the Sacrament of *Baptism*; and of the *Spirit* by the due Improvement of that Measure of *divine Grace* imparted to every true *Believer*, in order to assist him in the regular Discharge of his Baptismal Vow and Covenant. After what Manner the *Holy Spirit* helps our Infirmities, prevents Us in all Our Doings, and consequently leads us into a *State of Regeneration*, is not easy to determine. *The Wind bloweth, says our Saviour to Nicodemus, where it listeth, and thou hearest the Sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whi-*

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ther. it goeth: So, as he proceeds to argue, is every one that is born of the Spirit.

From this Comparison, made by our Saviour between the Properties of the *Wind*, and the Work of *Regeneration*, it seems evident, that sincere Christians, of every *Denomination*, may know Themselves to be *regenerate*, as well as grafted into the Body of Christ's *holy Church*, from the Effects naturally attending their *Second Birth*; though the Cause and Progress of that *Birth* are not always visible. Wheresoever we see any Man maintaining a constant regular Course of Virtue, and pursuing religious Ends by proper and consistent Methods, we may reasonably, and ought indeed to pronounce such a Person *born of Water and the Spirit*; since every such regular and uniform Practice is the genuine Product of *divine Grace*, and the Influences of the *Spirit*; and cannot, in the Reason and Nature of Things, be produced from any Other Principle.

Let, therefore, the inferior Part of Mankind study *to be quiet*, mind the proper Business of their *Callings* for the Benefit of their *Families*, and Never suffer themselves

to be carried into idle Expences of Time and Money, by every *Wind of Doctrine*, through the Subtlety or vain Pretences of such Persons, as Industriously go about to deceive the *Credulous* and *Unwary*: And let Men of all Conditions thankfully improve their several Gifts, whether spiritual or acquired, to the Purposes they were given; without vainly pretending to be more *righteous* than others, or wise and knowing *above what is written*: Never flattering Themselves, or endeavouring to impose upon Others, with imaginary abstruse Notions concerning any religious Point in Question, contrary to the Perfection and Original Design of the *Gospel*. To the *Law* and the *Testimony* it is both our Duty and our Interest to bring all our *religious Notions, and Conduct*, as to an Unalterable Standard: And, as they agree with, or contradict this, determine concerning the *Evil or Morality* of them. For if we Occasionally bring our *religious Notions and Conduct* to such a reasonable Trial; we shall thereby be qualified to form a better and more satisfactory Judgment of our *Spiritual Condition*, than from any pretended

Visions

Visions or *new Revelations*, any violent *Pangs* or *Throws* of Conscience Artfully represented, or any pompous external *Shew* of *Devotion*, supported by *Bodily Austerities* of what Nature or Kind soever.

In a Word. Without *Holiness* no Man shall see the *Lord*; but he that doth Righteousness is *born of God*. A New Creature is *Faith, which worketh by Love*: And the Fruits of the *Spirit* are *Peace, Long-Suffering, Goodness, Temperance, Charity*. If Our Hearts do not condemn us for any *Disregard* to these bright *influencing Virtues*; then may we constantly rejoice under a modest and well-grounded Confidence, that, by thus having our Fruit *unto Holiness*, an Entrance shall be ministred unto us Abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of *God*, the Father of Christ Jesus our *Lord*: Who hath given us the inestimable Privilege of becoming his Sons by Adoption in *Baptism*; and graciously promised to make us *joint Heirs* with Christ our Saviour in this Everlasting Kingdom; if we daily endeavour to be *renewed* in Our Minds and Affections, through the Operations of his *Holy Spirit*.

F I N I S.